DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 328 UD 029 106

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TITLE	Minnesota's Educational Options for At-Risk Youth: Urban Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota State Dept. of Education, St. Paul.; Policy Studies Associates, Inc., Washington, DC.; Westat, Inc., Rockville, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (ED), Washington, DC. Div. of Career Education.
PUB DATE	92
CONTRACT	LC-89089001
NOTE	90p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disadvantaged Youth; *Dropout Prevention; Dropout Programs; *High Risk Students; High Schools; High School Students; Incentives; Minority Group Children; Nontraditional Education; Private Schools; Program Evaluation; Public Schools; State Programs; Student Attitudes; *Urban Youth; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Area Learning Center MN; *Minneapolis Public Schools MN; *Saint Paul Public Schools MN; Student Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study was done of two Minnesota State "second chance" program options designed to help at-risk students to complete high school. The options are: (1) private urban alternative programs, administered by non-sectarian, community-based organizations principally serving teenagers from Minneapolis and St. Paul (Minnesota); and (2) the Area Learning Centers (ALCs), which had originally been exclusively located in suburban and rural areas of the state but which are now available in the two major cities as well. The data for the study were gathered at the program sites in the spring of 1990. Student samples were drawn in advance of survey administration from lists of enrollees provided by the ALCs and urban alternative schools. The two organizations serve different populations: students in the urban alternative schools were 57 percent minority, while the ALCs drew only 8 percent minority. However, both programs serve reentry students and low income families and at both programs reasons for enrollment was to help students stay in school. Analysis of the data indicate extremely high levels of satisfaction with the programs, although students in the urban schools valued smaller classes while students at the ALCs valued being able to proceed at their own pace. In addition, the proportion of ALC participants who expected to obtain some postsecondary education appeared to have doubled. An appendix on study methodology and an appendix containing three student surveys are included. (JB)

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Minnesota's Educational Options For At-Risk Youth:

Urban Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers

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School District Enrollment Options Program

This interdistrict enrollment option (authorized in 1987 by Minnesota Statutes 120.062, 123.3515, 124A.036) allows families and students to apply to enroll in any school district other than the one in which they reside. Implementation was gradual, beginning in school year 1987-88. As of school year 1990-91, all districts in the state are required to participate in the program.

Application to change districts under this program does not guarantee approval. School boards may declare their districts entirely closed to nonresident students if no space is available. Similarly, specific schools or grade levels within schools may be closed to nonresident applicants when they are operating at full capacity. However, no district may deter a resident student from leaving to attend school in another district, with the exception of three cities operating under desegregation guidelines.

Because of their desegregation plans, Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul are special cases within this program. Students and families seeking to leave the schools in these cities must obtain the approval of both resident and nonresident district. The resident district may deny approval if racial balance will be disturbed. Students in these districts may apply and enroll at any time during the year.

Postsecondary Enrollment Option Program (PSEO)

This option (authorized in 1985 by Minnesota Statute 123.3514, 135A.10) allows 11th and 12th graders attending public schools to enroll either full time or part time at an eligible postsecondary institution prior to high school graduation. The program was first implemented in 1985.

If the postsecondary courses are taken for credit toward high school graduation, tuition, fees, and required textbooks are provided at no cost to the student. After graduation, if students matriculate at the same postsecondary institution, the courses already taken are placed on their college transcript.

Another option allows high school students to take postsecondary courses directly for credit toward a postsecondary degree or certificate. In this case, students and their families are responsible for all costs incurred. Students may also request high school credit for these courses.

High School Graduation Incentives Program

This program (authorized in 1987 by Minnesota Statute 126.22 - 126.23) is designed to encourage certain groups of youth and adults to complete high school. Individuals qualify for the program if they are: (1) two more years below grade level on an achievement test; (2) one or more years behind in graduation credits; (3) pregnant or a parent; or (4) chemically dependent. The program was first implemented in 1987.

Eligible persons ages 12-21 may apply to attend: (1) any public high school; (2) a private alternative program under contract with a public school district; (3) an approved public alternative program; (4) an Area Learning Center; or (5) a postsecondary institution under the Postsecondary Enrollment Option Program. A similar set of options is available to qualifying adults over age 21, with a two-year limit on participation.

Area Learning Centers

The Area Learning Centers (authorized in 1987 by Minnesota Statute 129B.52 - 129B.56) are one of the options available to persons participating in the High School Graduation Incentives Program or the School District Enrollment Options Program. The program was first implemented in 1987. There are currently 40 designated ALCs operating 70 sites around the state. The Centers enroll both residents and nonresidents of the school district in which they are located.

The ALCs focus on both academics and preparation for work, including the transition to employment. Programs are individualized. Students may receive a diploma from their home district or the district where the Center is located.

[Continued on inside back cover]

Other Interdistrict Choice Options

In addition to the programs profiled, some students in Minnesota attend school in a nonresident district under one of the following state statutes:

- Nonresident student attendance agreements (agreements between school boards)
- Previous enrollment (e.g., when family's residence changes)
- State Board-approved exceptions
- Continued enrollment choice for 11th and 12th grade students
- Tuition agreements between district and parent (parent pays costs)

Within-District Choice

Minneapolis and St. Paul offer extensive within-district choice through magnet schools, specialty programs, and other mechanisms. St. Paul has 22 elementary magnet schools, 17 specialty programs serving students in grades 6-12, and one K-12 Open School. In Minneapolis, every elementary school adopts one of five instructional philosophies among which parents may choose. In addition, the city has 12 elementary and 14 secondary magnets. Indications are that some suburban and rural districts are also developing within-district options.

OVERVIEW OF INTERDISTRICT SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN MINNESOTA

Numbers of K-12 Students Enrolled in a Nonresident District
Under Various Authorizing Mechanisms
(Data Collected By Minnesota Department of Education)

October, 1990

Mechanism	Number of Students Using
Family/Learner Choice Programs	
School District Enrollment Option (Open Enrollment)	5,940
Postsecondary Enrollment Option*	6,697
High School Graduation Incentives	2,397
Public alternative programs	2,193
Private alternative programs	1,036
Area Learning Centers (secondary only)[b]	11,810
	30,073
Percent of Total Enrollment:[a]	4%
District Agreements	
School board agreements	4,491
Previous enrollment (when family's residence changes)	103
State Board of Education-approved exceptions	22
Continued enrollment (grades 11 & 12)	567
	5,183
Percent of Total Enrollment:[a]	1%

*May 1991
[a]Total K-12 enrollment in Minnesota was 749,203 in October 1990.
[b]Total students served July 1, 1990 - June 30, 1991.

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MINNESOTA'S EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH:
Urban Alternative Schools and Area Learning Centers

Nancy E. Adelman

1992

Prepared for the
U.S. Department of Education
Contract LC 89089001

This report was supported by the Planning and Evaluation Service, Office of Policy and Planning, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract LC 89089001. It does not reflect official Department policy, and no endorsement of its contents by the Department should be inferred.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study reported on in this volume was a joint undertaking of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). Peggy Hunter served as MDE liaison and supervised the data collection effort, ably assisted by Mitchell White. MDE's Education Data Systems Division prepared the data sets. As subcontractor to the study, Westat, Incorporated provided assistance with the sampling plan and with the analyses of the data sets.

The study has benefited from the counsel of a panel of experts that includes:

Rolf Blank, Council of Chief State School Officers
Robert Boruch, University of Pennsylvania
James Coleman, University of Chicago
Josie Johnson, Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota
Michael O'Keefe, The McKnight Foundation, Minneapolis, MN
Carol Weiss, Harvard Graduate School of Education

This group formally approved the report before its publication. We thank them for their commitment to the study and their patience throughout the review process. Other outside reviewers included Joe Nathan of the Humphrey Institute, University of Minnesota and John Witte of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

During the planning stage for the study, MDE convened a group of stakeholders who contributed a number of useful suggestions on policy issues and the design of survey instruments. This group included representatives from the state legislature, state agencies, school districts, institutions of higher education, the Hubert Humphrey Institute, professional associations, and community-based organizations.

The author wishes to thank her colleagues on the study team. At one time or another, Michael Rubenstein, Kelly Colopy, Janie Funkhouser, Rosalind Hamar, and Elizabeth Reisner all made important contributions to the work reported on here. Peggy Thompson and Nancy Swann prepared the manuscript.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

As part of its initiative to offer students and their families educational options, the state of Minnesota enacted two statutes specifically authorizing programs designed to help at-risk students complete high school. The High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) Program and the Area Learning Centers (ALCs) serve students who meet certain qualifications such as poor school achievement, poor attendance, chemical dependence, or pregnancy. The HSGI Program offers students a number of options for continuing their education, including attendance at an ALC. In this study, we examined two types of these "second chance" options: (1) private urban alternative programs, administered by nonsectarian, community-based organizations and principally serving teenagers from Minneapolis and St. Paul; and (2) the Area Learning Centers, which in 1989-90 were exclusively located in suburban and rural areas of the state. (By 1990-91, Area Learning Centers were also available in Minneapolis and St. Paul.)

The data presented were collected at the program sites in the spring of 1990. Student samples were drawn in advance of survey administration from lists of enrollees provided by the Area Learning Centers and urban alternative schools. Sampled students who were actually in attendance on the day of survey administration completed written questionnaires. For sampled students not in attendance on that day, we determined their exit status:

- About one-fourth of the students who were listed on fall rosters had dropped out of the programs by spring.

Overview of the Sample

The urban alternative schools and Area Learning Centers serve somewhat different populations:

- Minnesota's racial and ethnic minorities are concentrated in its urban areas--principally the Twin Cities. Fifty-seven percent of student respondents enrolled in the urban alternative programs came from minority backgrounds.

- In the Area Learning Centers (located in suburban and rural areas), 8 percent of respondents were from minority backgrounds.

These proportions are in line with statewide enrollment patterns. Currently, about 52 percent of Minneapolis' total enrollment is minority; the proportion for St. Paul is 43 percent. Outside the Twin City Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA), minorities represent approximately 9 percent of statewide enrollments.

In some ways, the populations served by the two types of programs are similar:

- Both types of programs are serving significant numbers of re-entry students. Among survey respondents, 64 percent of ALC students and 50 percent of urban alternative school students indicated that they were returning to school after dropping out.

- In terms of socioeconomic status, about 40 percent of each sample report that they or their families have received welfare benefits within the last five years. (About 5 percent of the state's overall population receive AFDC payments.)

In other ways, however, the profiles of the two groups are quite different:

- Suburban and rural students attending the ALCs tend to be older than students enrolled in the urban alternative programs.

- ALC students are twice as likely as the urban students to report that their mothers attended some college.

- Urban students are far more likely to speak a language other than English at home. (In addition to a substantial Hispanic population in St. Paul, the Twin Cities are home to relatively large communities of Laotians, Hmongs, and Vietnamese.)

Reasons for Enrollment in a Nontraditional Secondary School Program

Whether or not they had previously dropped out of school, urban, suburban, and rural at-risk students agreed that their primary reason for enrolling in an urban alternative program or an Area Learning Center was to help them stay in school:

- Urban students tended to be more uniformly critical of their earlier educational experiences than were their suburban and rural counterparts. White students attending the urban alternative schools were far more vehement than any other group about their dislike for their previous educational experiences.

- More than two-thirds of the students surveyed in both types of settings reported that classes in their previous school or program were uninteresting and unchallenging

- Urban students overall were more likely to be seeking greater personalization in both instruction and relationships with teachers.

- Urban students also felt strongly that their scholastic efforts went unrecognized in traditional secondary schools.

The surveys sought information on who influenced students' decisions about enrollment in a nontraditional high school program. Suburban and rural students attending the ALCs reported far more input from guidance counselors and school principals at a previous school than did students enrolled in the urban alternative programs. In contrast, over 75 percent of urban students reported receiving parental support for their decision, while only 50 percent of ALC students cited parental encouragement.

Sources of Students' Information About Nontraditional Programs

The surveys asked students to identify ways in which they obtained information about the urban alternative schools and the suburban/rural ALCs. Possible information sources can be grouped into three categories: community-based sources, school-based sources, and the media.

- The single most important way in which students enrolled in both types of programs learned about their nontraditional educational options was through friends.

- In terms of other sources, ALC students were four times as likely to have obtained information about a school-based source than were their urban peers.

- For this particular adolescent subpopulation, the media play virtually no role as a source of information on alternative educational options.

Benefits of the Nontraditional Programs

The responding students indicated extremely high levels of satisfaction with the urban alternative and ALC programs. About two-thirds of both groups reported that they were very satisfied, while over 90 percent reported some level of satisfaction. Close to 90 percent of both groups claimed to be doing better academically. Problems associated with attendance at the nontraditional programs were considered minor by the students.

At a more specific level of analysis, some slight differences in perceived benefits emerged between the urban and the suburban/rural students:

- For students in the urban alternative schools, the greatest benefit of the nontraditional settings was smaller classes. Suburban/rural students placed the highest value on being able to proceed at their own pace.

- Urban students reacted more strongly to statements about improved attendance, self-esteem, and basic skills than did their non-urban peers.

Finally, the surveys attempted--not entirely successfully--to obtain information on students' expectations for themselves both before and after enrolling in a nontraditional program. Because respondents apparently had difficulty with the directions on this survey item, the results can only be considered suggestive. They are, however, striking:

- The proportion of ALC participants who expected to obtain some type of postsecondary education more than doubled--from 19 percent before enrollment in the ALC to 40 percent at the time of survey administration.

- Among the urban students, the increase in personal expectations was seven-fold. Only 6 percent of urban students indicated that they had expected to go on to a postsecondary institution before enrolling at the alternative schools; 42 percent now plan to continue their education beyond high school.

The survey data cannot tell us how realistic these students are being about either their current educational status or their long-term plans. Informal conversations with administrators and teachers in some of the programs indicated that the pace at which many students were accumulating credits toward high school graduation was often painfully slow, and for many, attendance issues continue to be a problem.

Overall, the Area Learning Centers and urban alternative schools appear to be successfully filling a useful niche in Minnesota's array of educational options available to secondary school students. Without these programs, many of the students enrolled would not be endeavoring to complete high school. This study did not attempt to evaluate the quality of the education that the programs provide. Nor did it systematically investigate student outcomes such as test scores or credits accrued. However, the data clearly reveal that participating students believe that these programs address their needs better than a comprehensive secondary school.

MINNESOTA'S EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

Introduction

Despite its placement near the top of any state-by-state listing of high school graduation rates, Minnesota has a significant cohort of young people who can be termed "at risk" of not earning a high school diploma. In order to encourage this population to complete school, the Minnesota legislature has authorized a variety of "second chance" options under two major pieces of legislation: (1) the High School Graduation Incentives (Minnesota Statute 126.22 - 126.23) and (2) the Area Learning Centers (ALCs) (Minnesota Statute 129B.52 - 129B.56). Minnesota views these second chance programs as an integral part of its overall constellation of educational choices for families and students.[1]

The High School Graduation Incentives (HSGI) program primarily puts choice in the hands of individuals who meet one or more of the following qualifications:

- At least two grades below grade level on a local achievement test
- At least one year behind in graduation credits
- Pregnant or a parent

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[1]Passage of educational choice legislation in Minnesota was incremental, beginning with the Postsecondary Education Option in 1985. Each component of the array of options now available in the state came into being only after long and often rancorous debate. According to Mazzoni (1986), inclusion of a controlled "second chance" option for at-risk students as part of a broader statewide choice agenda was first introduced by a member of the Governor's Discussion Group [on educational choice] in December, 1986. At a subsequent December meeting, the second chance program encountered opposition and was dropped. Principally because of the Governor's intervention and new sponsorship within the Governor's Discussion Group for a second chance provision, a strengthened version of the original proposal appeared in the bill presented to the legislature during its 1987 session.

- Assessed as chemically dependent
- Self-defined as a dropout

These criteria define our use of the term "at risk" throughout this report. The HSGI authority may also be used by adults of any age who have completed 10th grade but did not graduate from high school. However, the study reported on here examines the impact of the HSGI options only on youth of traditional secondary school age--approximately 12-18.

In Minnesota, young people who meet one of the criteria can choose from several settings in which to continue their education. These include:

- Any public high school
- A private (nonsectarian) school holding a contract with a public school district to provide services, as allowed under Minnesota law
- An approved public alternative school or program
- An Area Learning Center (ALC)
- A college or technical institute (for students who have reached the 11th grade and meet the requirements of the postsecondary institution)[2]

State funding follows the student to any of these settings. According to a survey of Minnesota school districts, almost half of the state's districts (47 percent) have had students either enter or leave as a result of participation in the HSGI option.

The option of applying to attend any public high school effectively gives at-risk youth the same statewide breadth of choice available through the more highly publicized family open enrollment option. As with the Open

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[2] Although it is an option available to some HSGI and Area Learning Center students, the Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) program is open to all 11th and 12th graders enrolled in public schools and does not specifically target at risk youth. The study reported on here did not examine PSEO. Interested readers are referred to Access to Opportunity (Nathan & Jennings, 1990) and Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program. Final Report (Minnesota Department of Education, 1987).

Enrollment program, approval of a student's application is dependent on space and desegregation considerations. Some unknown number of at-risk students do choose to continue a regular high school program in a different but traditional high school. This study unsuccessfully attempted to learn about the experiences of a sample of such students through a direct mail survey (see the technical appendix to this report). The incidence and impacts of this aspect of the HSGI Program remain essentially unexamined.

The data and analyses presented in succeeding sections of this report are based on information collected from students enrolled in (1) 12 private urban alternative schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul and (2) 21 Area Learning Centers operating in school year 1989-90. A brief overview of these two types of educational programs appears below.

Private urban alternative schools. The Twin Cities have a long and substantial history of offering students educational choices. Stretching back to the late 1960s and pre-dating broader national interest in the use of options such as magnet schools for desegregation purposes, Minneapolis and St. Paul developed urban alternative schools or programs of various types, including some for the population that is, in current terminology, at risk. When the HSGI law was passed in 1987, the existing public urban alternative schools came under the umbrella of the new legislation. In addition, the law authorized school districts to contract with private, nonsectarian providers (e.g., community based organizations) for educational services to at-risk youth. The result is an array of alternative programs available to urban teenagers. Organizing principles vary. Some have an ethnocentric focus. Others focus on basic skills. All are officially approved sites where students may complete high school graduation requirements.

The urban at-risk students surveyed for this study attended 12 of 14 private, non-sectarian alternative schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul. All are members of the Federation of Alternative Schools; all receive state support. Enrollments at these schools or programs ranged from 11 to 134 in 1989-90.

Area Learning Centers. The Area Learning Centers--or ALCs--were created by separate legislation in 1987 and placed under the general rubric of the HSGI Programs. Four ALCs were established as demonstration projects in school year 1988-89. By the following year, 23 had been approved, and 21 were in operation. Some ALCs emerged from existing programs (e.g., a cooperative dropout prevention and re-entry program sponsored by several very small districts). Others were created specifically under the ALC legislation. The first urban ALCs have recently been

approved and began serving students in 1990-91. While specific ALC programs vary, key features include:

- Year-round operation
- Full or part-time attendance
- Day, evening, and weekend classes
- Emphasis on job preparation as well as fulfilling the academic requirements for high school graduation
- Transition services to further education or employment

Thirty-five percent of the state's suburban and rural school districts reported that they sent one or more currently enrolled students to an Area Learning Center for their educational program in school year 1989-90.

This report on the experiences of students in Minnesota's urban alternative schools and Area Learning Centers is organized around four basic research questions: Who utilizes these programs? Why do students in Minnesota seek an alternative to traditional schooling? How do students learn about the educational choices available to them? How beneficial do students find these programs?

Who utilizes the urban alternative schools and Area Learning Center programs?

During the fall semester of school year 1989-90, 12 private urban alternative schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul carried 609 secondary level students on their combined rosters. In rural and suburban areas throughout the state, Area Learning Centers enrolled a total of 2,630 at-risk students during the same time frame. The Minnesota Department of Education attempted to survey approximately 60 percent of each of these populations.[3] The surveys were group-administered at the school sites in the spring semester of 1990.

Table 1 presents characteristics of the sample of students who completed surveys. In terms of ethnic background and language spoken at home, the ALCs and the urban alternative schools clearly serve different populations, but ones representational of state demographics. Most of Minnesota's minority population lives in the Twin Cities where the 12 urban alternative schools in the sample are located. Principal ethnic groups include African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and Southeast Asians. During school year 1989-90, white students became a minority in the Minneapolis school system for the first time. In greater Minnesota, as the rest of the state is known, minorities represent about 9 percent of K-12 enrollment. Their 8 percent representation among suburban and rural ALC attendees seems to indicate that they are proportionately represented in these programs.

The ALCs serve an older group (as measured by last grade completed) and a higher proportion of students who have re-entered school after dropping out. Because this study did not investigate particular programmatic features of either the ALCs or the urban alternative schools, the full implications of

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[3] The sampling consultant to the study suggested that a 30 percent random sample of the populations enrolled in the private urban alternative schools and the Area Learning Centers would yield representative data on the students who use these options. However, informal conversations with educators in Minnesota led us to believe that we could anticipate considerable student turnover in these programs. We therefore deliberately identified a 60 percent random sample in the hope of actually finding enough students still enrolled to conduct our analyses.

TABLE 1

Characteristics of Secondary School Students Served
By Two of Minnesota's Second Chance Education Programs

	Area Learning Centers (n=536)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=97)
Race		
White	92% *	43% *
Minority	8 *	57 *
Last grade completed		
6th grade or less	< 1%	1%
7th grade	< 1	2
8th grade	5 *	17 *
9th grade	17	15
10th grade	26	34
11th grade	51 *	26 *
Dropout status		
Have dropped out	64% *	50% *
Never dropped out	36 *	50 *
Living arrangements		
Live with one parent	32% *	44% *
Live with both parents	39	36
Other living arrangement	29 *	20 *
Welfare status		
Received public assistance in last 5 years	38%	40%
Mother's education		
Less than high school diploma	16%	22%
High school graduate	41	42
Any postsecondary	35	26
Don't know	8	11
Language spoken at home		
English	94% *	81% *
Other language	6 *	19 *

* The chances are 95 in 100 that real differences between the two groups of students exist after taking sampling error into account.

this finding are a little difficult to interpret. As new programs, the ALCs may have deliberately targeted or recruited re-entry students. On the other hand, some of the more established urban alternative schools may be very effective and well-known safety nets, catching younger students before they drop out. It is also possible that suburban and rural students in Minnesota tend to stay in school longer than urban students before dropping out. As the ALC program matures, the Minnesota Department of Education may want to undertake a full-scale assessment of program effectiveness, comparing the ALC model with the various urban alternative school designs. It is very clear that both of these options fill a needed niche in the array of educational choices that the state provides--particularly for the population of young people who have previously dropped out of school.

Students' reports on their living arrangements also vary between the ALC and urban alternative school populations. Students attending urban alternative schools are more likely to be living with a parent than are their ALC counterparts. Indeed, three times as many ALC students (28 percent) indicated that they lived with someone other than a parent, other relative, or guardian; the comparable proportion for urban alternative school students is 9 percent. This factor is probably related to the relatively higher age of students served by the ALCs and may be related to other demographic variables --such as different marriage rates in rural and urban areas--as well. Furthermore, although the survey did not directly ask respondents whether they were either pregnant or a parent, one item offered this response as a possible reason for enrolling in an ALC or alternative program. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of female ALC enrollees cited pregnancy or parenting as one factor in their decision to enroll and nearly one-third of those (30 percent) said it was the most important factor. In contrast, only 4 percent of urban alternative school students selected this response category and none considered it the most important.

Nearly equal proportions (about 40 percent) of ALC and urban alternative school students report that either they or their families have received public

assistance at some time during the past five years. For the state as a whole, about 5 percent of residents received AFDC payments in 1988.[4]

The highest level of education attained by students' mothers--a variable that often correlates positively with both student achievement and persistence in school--is fairly comparable for the suburban/rural and urban student populations sampled. For the purposes of Table 1, we combined all categories of mother's postsecondary attendance. However, as Table 2 shows, the actual survey item allowed more detailed analysis of mother's post-high school education as well.

TABLE 2

Student Reports of Mother's Postsecondary Educational Participation
(Percent citing postsecondary participation)[a]

Mother's Education	Area Learning Centers (n=492)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=94)
No postsecondary	57%	64%
Business or trade school	9	6
Some college	14 *	7 *
College graduate	7	10
More than 4 years of college	5	2
Don't know	9	11

[a] Percents may not total 100 because of rounding.
* The chances are 95 in 100 that real differences between the two groups of students exist after taking sampling error into account.

[4] We deliberately selected AFDC status as a proxy for SES in the student surveys rather than family income ranges because experience has shown that teenagers' estimates of family income are highly unreliable. For the age group involved in these programs, eligibility for free or reduced price lunch is also an unreliable variable because many potentially eligible students do not apply.

Mothers of the suburban and rural ALC students are twice as likely to have some college education as the mothers of the urban alternative school students. On the other hand, at least according to their children, both groups of mothers are equally likely to have earned a college degree or above. For both groups, the proportion of mothers holding a college degree or with some college is substantially lower than figures for the state overall. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that 35 percent of adult Minnesotans have completed between one and three years of college, while 17 percent are college graduates. In the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul area, 26 percent of adults over 25 are college graduates. (These proportions, which are an imperfect comparison because they include adults of all ages and both sexes, are undoubtedly higher for the age groups most likely to be the parents of teenagers.)

Overall, the profile of program participants presented in Table 1 indicates that the urban alternative schools and the Area Learning Centers are, indeed, serving the at-risk student population for which the High School Graduation Incentives Program was designed. Many have already dropped out at some point in their educational careers. They and their families are far more likely to require public assistance than the average resident. Some may struggle with language barriers. Others juggle school and parenting. Quite a number are living on their own. In fact, it is highly probable that the lives of many individual students within the sample cohorts are characterized by multiple risk factors that would make it difficult for them to complete high school in a traditional setting.

A key finding from this data collection effort concerns the rate of attrition among program participants. If a sampled student was not in attendance on the day of survey administration, program staff were asked to indicate that student's current status with the school. As Table 3 shows, of 349 students in the urban alternative school sample, significant numbers of students left the 12 programs in the course of the school year. The situation was similar in the ALCs. In both types of programs, the largest proportion of students no longer enrolled had dropped out of school entirely--29 percent for the ALCs and 26 percent for the urban alternatives.

How does this attrition rate compare with programs in other parts of the country that are specifically designed to encourage at-risk students to

complete high school? Comparable statistics are difficult to find in the dropout prevention literature. However, the U.S. Department of Labor is funding a demonstration project called High School Redirection. Data collected from five sites that are replicating this model dropout recovery program show that, on the average, 33 percent of enrolled students dropped out during the first semester and 16 percent during the second semester.[5] Dropout rates at Minnesota's Area Learning Centers and urban alternative schools (29 percent and 26 percent respectively) thus do not appear to be out of line with the experiences of other similar programs.

TABLE 3

Status of All Sampled Students
in Urban Alternative Schools or Area Learning Centers
(Percent of students by school type)

Exit Status	Area Learning Centers		Urban Alternative Schools	
In school--completed survey	34%	(536)[a]	28%	(97)
Dropped out	29	(451)	26	(90)
Graduated	8	(117)	7	(26)
Transferred	8	(117)	13	(46)
Unknown/other	5	(78)	32	(12)
Absent	9	(141)	3	(9)
Missing cases	7	(115)	20	(69)
Total sample	100%	(1,555)	100%	(349)

[a] Numbers in parentheses represent the sample number.

[5] The source for these figures is First Phase Implementation Report: High School Redirection Demonstration Project submitted to DOL by the Academy for Educational Development in December, 1989..

Why do students seek an alternative to traditional schooling?

The survey asked students attending urban alternative schools and Area Learning Centers about their reasons for enrolling in these nontraditional programs. Their responses appear in Table 4 below. The low percentage of minority students in the ALCs prohibited analyses by race. For the urban alternative schools, where minorities constituted over half of the respondents, differences between white and minority student responses are displayed.

Overall, students in the ALC and alternative school programs decided to attend principally because they hoped that the programs would help them stay in school. Comparing the responses of students in the two types of programs, personalization in both instruction and relationships is a greater issue for the urban students overall. Within the urban alternative school population, this emphasis does not vary greatly by ethnicity. However, white students attending the urban alternatives appear to dislike their previous educational situation more strongly than do either their classmates from minority backgrounds or students attending the ALCs. Reasons for the intensity of this response could be explored through other research methodologies.

About one-third of the ALC students and one-sixth of the alternative school students identified the opportunity to re-enter school after dropping out as a major reason for their enrollment. Among the urban students, re-entry was a more important factor for white students than for minorities. There seems little doubt that the availability of these programs offers a critical educational lifeline to the re-entry population.

Although pregnancy and parenting did not loom large for either population as a reason for enrolling in a nontraditional program, analyses showed an interesting differential between the urban and suburban/rural students and between males and females in the Area Learning Centers. Nineteen percent of all ALC respondents cited pregnancy or parenting as one reason for enrollment. In contrast, only 4 percent of the urban alternative school students did so. Further, nearly a third (32 percent) of the young women enrolled in the ALCs indicated that pregnancy or parenting was one reason that they decided to enroll in the program, and nearly one-third of these (30 percent) cited it as the most important reason. (Only 1 percent of males cited this reason for enrolling.)

TABLE 4

Students' Reasons for Decision to Attend
an Area Learning Center or Alternative School
(Percent Citing Reason)

Reasons	Area Learning Centers	Urban Alternative Schools		
	All Students (n=526)	All (n=91)	White (n=39)	Minority (n=52)
To help me stay in school	77	83	87	83
To leave a school I didn't like	53	58	74 *	46 *
To be able to work and go to school	49 *	21 *	15	25
To change to more individualized or personalized learning	44 *	58 *	54	60
To get teachers who are really interested in me and how I'm doing	44 *	56 *	56	60
To re-enter school after dropping out	35 *	17 *	26	10
To stay in school after getting pregnant or becoming a parent	19 *	4 *	3	6

* The chances are 95 in 100 that real differences between the two groups of students exist after taking sampling error into account.

Secondary school students who transferred under Minnesota's statewide open enrollment option reported some of the same reasons for changing schools as the ALC and alternative school students.[6] Table 5 allows comparisons among these three groups on eight items that were common across the surveys. The at-risk students are obviously much more emphatic about their primary reason for enrolling in a nontraditional program--to help them stay in school.

[6] A parallel data collection effort surveyed parents and secondary school students who utilized Minnesota's open enrollment statute to change school districts during school year 1989-90. Findings of the study are reported on more extensively in R. Hamar, M. C. Rubenstein, and N. E. Adelman, Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, 1991).

Among the open enrollment students, the two most pressing reasons for changing schools were (1) to leave a school they didn't like (46 percent) and (2) to take courses not available in their previous school (46 percent). As the table indicates, the at-risk students concurred in their dislike of previous schools. However, available courses are virtually not a factor in the decision making of this population. Instead, they cited things like being

TABLE 5

Comparison of Open Enrollment Students' Reasons For Changing Schools With Those of ALC and Alternative School Students (Percent citing reason)

Reason for Decision	Open Enrollment (n=603)	ALCs (n=526)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=91)
To leave a school I didn't like	46 *	53 *	58
To take courses not available in my school	46 *	6 *	5
To get teachers who are really interested in me and how I'm doing	43	44	56
To avoid being bored	22 *	14 *	13
To help me stay in school	12 *	77 *	83
To help me decide whether or not to pursue more education	8 *	21 *	21
To be able to work and go to school	6 *	50 *	21
To follow the advice of my school counselor or principal	3 *	15 *	6

• Parallel item not available.

* Comparing the ALC students and the Open Enrollment students, where sample sizes are similar, the chances are 95 in 100 that the differences between the two groups remain significant after taking sampling error into account.

able to combine school and work (50 percent of ALC respondents) or to get more individualized or personalized instruction (57 percent of alternative school enrollees).

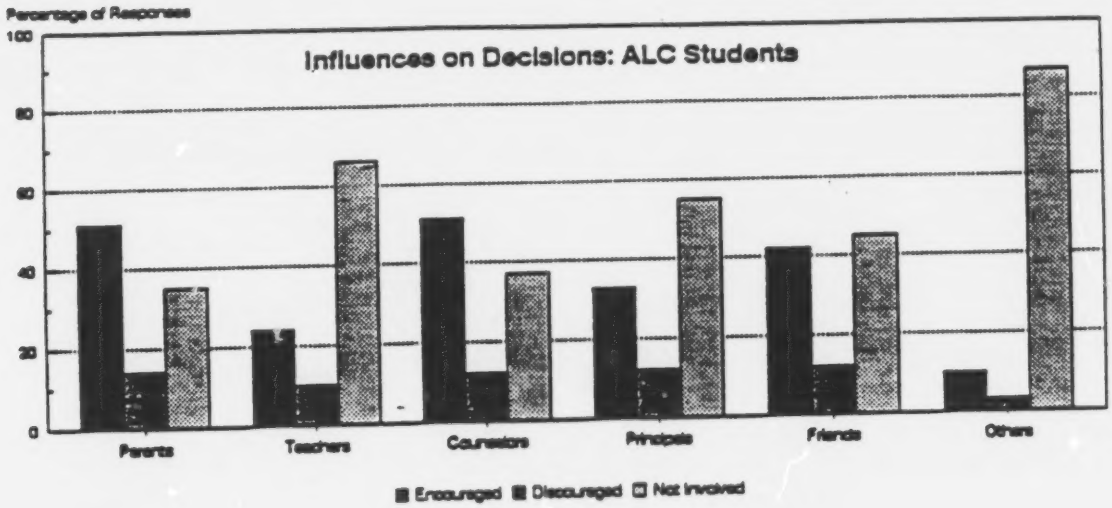
Substantial proportions of all three groups are in agreement on their desire to find teachers who care about them. The general perception among secondary school students that teachers don't see them as individuals or that they are lost in the crowd may be endemic to the adolescent years. In a later survey item about the benefits of changing to a new school, all three groups indicated that they had found teachers who understood them better (see Table 10).

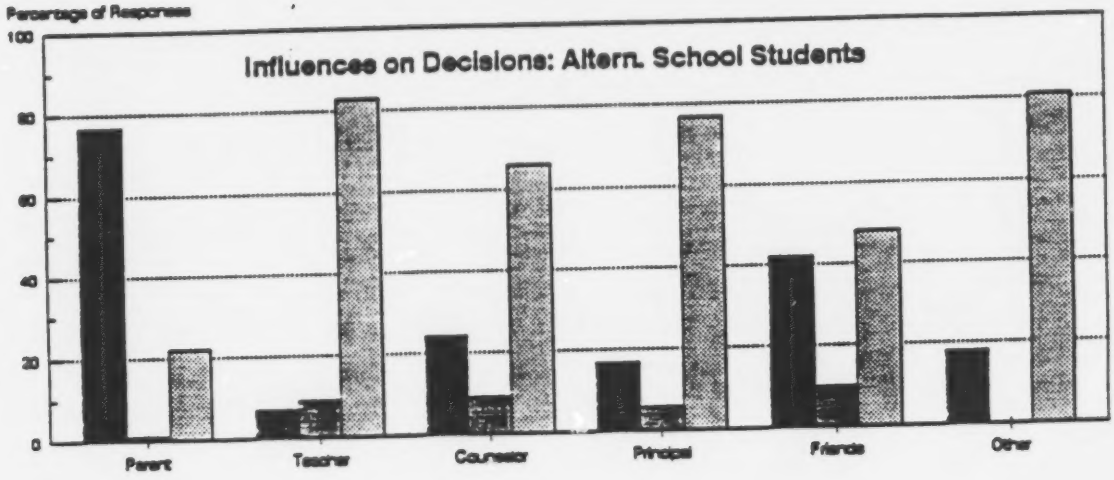
Assuming that responding students interpreted the statement "To help me decide whether or not to pursue more education" to mean postsecondary education, the fact that only 8 percent of the open enrollment students indicated that they changed schools for this reason suggests that many already consider themselves college-bound. In fact, 46 percent indicated elsewhere that they had expected to attend college even before they changed schools. The ALC and urban alternative school students, on the other hand, are less likely to take postsecondary attendance as a given.

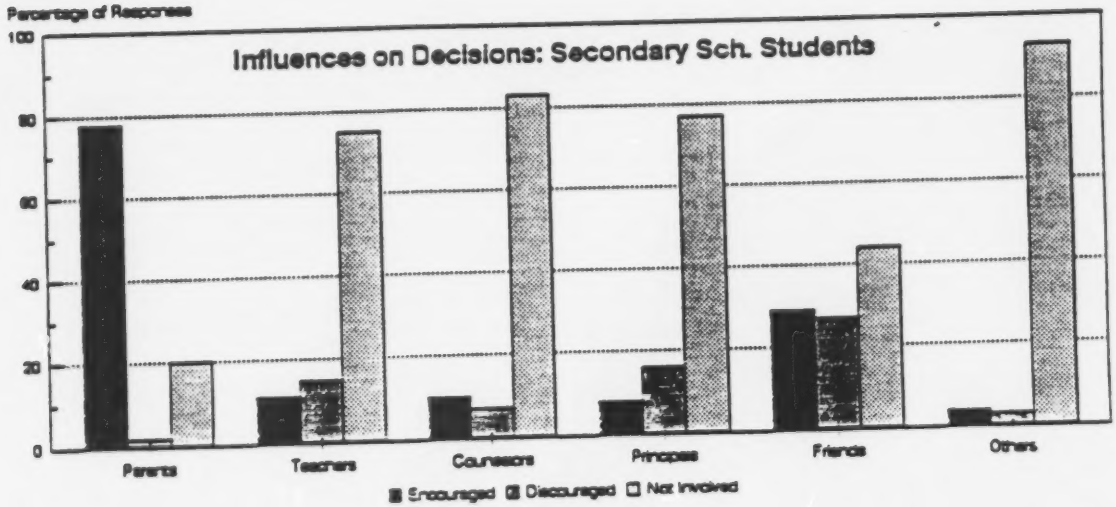
Finally, although Table 5 indicates that students in all three groups do not consider the advice of counselors and principals to be a major factor in their decision to change schools, there is some variation among the groups on the supportiveness of school-based staff in the decision-making process. Figure 1 shows the relative influence of different categories of individuals on students' thinking.

Over half of the ALC students (51 percent) report that a counselor encouraged their decision and one-third (33 percent) were encouraged by a school principal. Teachers were less influential at 24 percent but nevertheless played a role. In contrast, urban alternative school students report equivalent encouragement from teachers but much lower levels of encouragement from a counselor or principal at their previous school. It is likely that these distinctions, in part, reflect differences in recruitment or program assignment practices between the ALCs and the urban alternative schools. It may also be a result of large high schools and therefore heavy case loads for guidance counselors in the traditional urban high schools from

FIGURE 1


Percentage of Responses
Influences on Decisions: ALC Students
100
80
60
40
20
0
Parents
Teachers
Counselors
Principals
Friends
Others
Encouraged
Discouraged
Not Involved


Percentage of Responses
Influences on Decisions: Altern. School Students
100
80
60
40
20
0
Parent
Teacher
Counselor
Principal
Friends
Other


Percentage of Responses
Influences on Decisions: Secondary Sch. Students
100
80
60
40
20
0
Parents
Teachers
Counselors
Principals
Friends
Others
Encouraged
Discouraged
Not Involved

which the alternative school students transferred; counselors (and principals as well)may simply have less personal contact with individual students in these settings.

The open enrollment students are the least likely to indicate that school staff were involved in their decision to change schools. Issues related to schools or districts actively discouraging families from using the open enrollment option are discussed in a companion report. Here we merely note that, not surprisingly, secondary students moving under this option do not seem to consult with teachers, counselors, or administrators in their districts of residence about their interest in transferring to a new school.

Figure 1 also highlights differences in the influence of families and friends on students' decisionmaking. Over three-fourths of both the urban alternative school and open enrollment students report that their parents encouraged them to change schools. Only about 50 percent of ALC students indicate parental encouragement for their decision. Further, on another survey item, only 3 percent of the ALC students said that the idea of enrolling in an ALC originated with their parents; the comparable proportion for urban alternative school students is 12 percent and for open enrollment students 33 percent. The fact that ALC students appear to operate with less input from families is consistent with the profile presented in Table 1 and with other indicators of their independence, such as combining school and work or school and parenting. These students are older and many have made a previous decision to drop out of school--probably without encouragement from their families. Of the 147 ALC students who reported that they did not live with one or both parents, nearly half (43 percent) indicated that their parents were not involved or were neutral during the decision-making process. The comparable figure for students living with a parent is 31 percent.

It is a fair assumption that most students seeking to attend a new or different school/program found something lacking in their earlier school experiences. The survey asked respondents to agree or disagree with a list of statements related to classes, school climate, and relationships with school personnel before they enrolled in their current school. The results are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6 contains a set of statements about schools that we might not expect disaffected students to agree with. In fact, relatively low

proportions of students in both the ALCS and urban alternative schools agreed with these statements. Students in the urban alternative schools were more unanimous in their indictment of previous school experiences. Somewhat surprisingly, the nonminority students in the urban schools reported the most disgruntlement with their previous school experiences.

Further analyses of the ALC group found that re-entry students are less likely to agree with the statement that "I got along well with teachers" than students who had never dropped out (51 percent vs. 64 percent agreeing). However, other percentage differences between dropouts and nondropouts or males and females were not significant.

TABLE 6

At-Risk Students' Opinions of
Their Previous School Experiences
(Percent agreeing with statement)

Statements	Area Learning Centers	Urban Alternative Schools		
	All Students (n=521)	All (n=90)	White (n=38)	Minority (n=52)
Most classes were interesting and challenging.	36	28	13 *	35 *
My teachers were interested in me.	37	27	14 *	32 *
When I worked hard on school work, my teachers praised my effort.	44 *	11 *	24	35
Discipline was fair in my school.	51	50	42	58
My counselors were helpful to me.	53 *	31 *	30	32

* The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between the groups of students remain after taking sampling error into account.

In Table 7, the statements are phrased such that we might expect many at-risk students to agree with them. In fact, the only statement with which a majority of all students in the two settings agree has to do with classroom disruptions. Also, more than half of the minority students in urban alternative schools report that their classes in their former school were repetitive. One possible explanation for this response may relate to tracking. Some research suggests that students from minority backgrounds are disproportionately tracked into lower level courses at the secondary school level. However, further research would be required to establish this as an explanation for the minority students' perceptions in this case.

TABLE 7

At-Risk Students' Opinions of
Their Previous School Experiences
(Percent agreeing with statement)

Statements	Area Learning Centers	Urban Alternative Schools		
	All Students (n=521)	All (n=90)	White (n=38)	Minority (n=52)
Students often disrupted class.	58	63	68	62
Most classes repeated information I had already learned.	47	46	38	55
School interfered with work.	32 *	17 *	18	18
In class, I often felt "picked on" by my teachers.	30	27	34	19
In school, I often felt "picked on" by other students.	26 *	17 *	16	16
I didn't feel safe at school.	18	20	21	20

* The chances are 95 in 100 that for starred items, real differences between the groups of students remain after taking sampling error into account.

Most of the statements in Table 7 relate to school climate. By and large, the students in the sample do not seem to have found their previous schools to be threatening, either physically or psychologically. That they report classroom disruptions suggests that there were discipline problems.

Secondary school students changing schools under the open enrollment option responded very differently from the ALC and alternative school students on a number of statements about previous school experiences. Table 8 presents the five most discrepant sets of responses.

TABLE 8

Comparison of Open Enrollment and At-Risk Students' Opinions of Their Previous School Experiences (Percent agreeing with statement)

Statements	Open Enrollment (n=585)	ALCs (n=521)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=90)
I got along well with my teachers.	85 *	56 *	53
My teachers were interested in me.	67 *	37 *	27
Discipline was fair in my school.	65 *	51 *	50
When I worked hard on school work, my teachers praised my effort.	62 *	44 *	31
Most of my teachers really listened to what I had to say.	60 *	35 *	36

* Comparing the ALC students and the Open Enrollment students, where sample sizes are similar, the chances are 95 in 100 that the differences between the two groups remain significant after taking sampling error into account.

Despite their responses in other survey items indicating, for example, that they did not like their previous school, the open enrollment students clearly have had more positive educational experiences than the at-risk

students. Relationships with previous teachers are obviously a particular area of difference between the populations. While open enrollment students have some complaints about the personal attention that they received from teachers, they overwhelmingly report cordial relationships.

How do at-risk students learn about the educational choices available to them?

The Minnesota urban alternative schools and ALCs serve some unknown proportion of the state's students who might benefit from their services. We can presume that there are other students in Minnesota who know about these programs but have rejected the idea of enrolling in them. There are also eligible students who do not know that they exist.

Making information about the choice options more available to the community is an important issue for the Minnesota Department of Education and for local districts. The survey asked students to identify all the ways in which they learned about their program and to identify the most important source. The possible information sources presented can be grouped into school-based, community-based (the latter including family and friends), and media-based information sources.

The single most important way in which students at the urban alternative schools and the ALCs learned about the programs is through their friends. Sixty-seven percent of all ALC respondents and 63 percent of urban alternative school respondents named friends as one source of information (see Table 9). Both groups also cited friends as the most important source of information. Counselors and school or program administrators ran a distant second and third for the ALC students, while parents and community agencies were somewhat important sources for the urban alternative school enrollees.

Table 9 presents the most important sources of information cited by students, combined into the three broader categories described above. For the at-risk populations, community-based sources of information are extremely important in getting the word out about the availability of educational choices. Particularly for the urban students (over half of whom, in this sample, are minority), information distributed by the schools--whether as printed matter or through direct contact--does not appear to be an

TABLE 9

Most Important Sources of Program Information, by Category
(Percent citing source)

Type of Source	Area Learning Centers (n=333)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=63)
Community-based sources		
--Friends	41	44
--Family/Other	13 *	35 *
School-based sources	39 *	10 *
Media	1	0
Other	7	11

* The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between the groups of students remain after taking sampling effort into account.

effective dissemination mechanism. In fact, urban alternative school students cited a probation officer as an information source nearly four times as often as a teacher.

ALC students are more strongly connected to school-based information sources, particularly counselors. Nevertheless, community-based sources remain most important for these suburban and rural at-risk students. The media (print, audio, or visual), which were an important source of information for parents using the open enrollment option, appear to be totally ineffective communication channels with these groups of students. Curiously, none of the student respondents indicated that they had utilized the Options Hotline, a well-publicized toll-free number maintained by the Minnesota Department of Education to field inquiries and provide advice to families and students interested in the various option programs. (Within the metropolitan Minneapolis-St. Paul area, callers do not need to use the toll-free 800 area code. The Hotline logs thousands of calls each year. It is likely that students (or their parents) do make some use of it but do not realize that they have done so.

Most students (over 80 percent of each group) said that they experienced no difficulty in obtaining good information about the program in which they were interested. The most commonly cited problem among those who did experience some frustrations was a lack of helpfulness on the part of their former school.

How beneficial do students find the alternative schools and Area Learning Center programs?

Among the students who completed surveys, satisfaction levels with their ALC or urban alternative school program were very high. Sixty-four percent of the ALC students and 69 percent of urban alternative school students reported that they were very satisfied with their programs; 94 percent of both groups indicated satisfaction at some level. Part of the students' satisfaction comes from their overwhelming perception that they are doing better in school. Only 11 percent of the urban alternative school students and 14 percent of the ALC students believe they are doing the same or worse than they had in their former school or program. In addition, the sampled students experienced few problems in their transition to a new program. Problems that were acknowledged--such as transportation, childcare arrangements, or feeling prepared to handle assignments--were generally considered minor.

The survey asked students to indicate ways in which attendance at an ALC or an urban alternative school made a difference for them. Table 10 shows the statements to which they responded most strongly. As with other analyses presented in this report, the small number of minority students attending ALCs prohibited stratification by ethnicity.

While all the percentages in this table are quite high, there are some clear differences in educational priorities between the urban alternative school students and the suburban/rural students in the ALCs. For the urban students, the greatest benefit of the urban alternative schools is smaller classes. This response is in line with their relatively greater emphasis on personalization issues as a reason for changing schools and likely reflects a generalizable problem faced by marginal or disaffected students in large, traditional, urban high schools.

Other possible program benefits to which the urban students reacted more strongly than the ALC students include attendance, self-esteem, and basic

TABLE 10

Most Commonly Cited Benefits of
Area Learning Centers and Urban Alternative Schools
(Percent citing benefit)

Benefits	Area Learning Center	Urban Alternative Schools		
	All Students (n=528)	All (n=90)	White (n=39)	Minority (n=51)
I can proceed at my own level and pace.	87	79	82	75
I am more sure I will finish high school.	84 *	69 *	74	65
I have fewer school problems.	81	74	79	73
My classes are smaller.	79 *	89 *	92	86
I am taking responsibility for my own schooling.	76	66	67	67
My teachers and counselors take more time with me and understand me better.	74	75	87 *	65 *
I am learning more.	67	58	67	55
I feel better about myself and my abilities.	64 *	76 *	79	76
I am being treated as a capable and worthwhile person.	64	72	77	69
I come to school more regularly.	61 *	78 *	74	75
My basic reading and math skills have improved.	42 *	64 *	62	67

* The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between the groups of students remain after taking sampling error into account.

skills issues. Any explanations for these differences are speculative. The urban sample contains proportionately more students in 9th and 10th grades--years when all young people are searching for an identity and when dropping

out seems to be especially prevalent, which may have some bearing on the strength of their responses to the self-esteem items.

Except in one instance, differences in responses between the minority and nonminority students in the urban alternative schools are not particularly significant. The white students reacted much more strongly to the statement about teachers and counselors understanding them better, which parallels their generally higher levels of disaffection with their old schools discussed earlier. Depending on the backgrounds of the instructional and counseling staff in the programs, the explanation for this difference may involve cultural factors. To the minority respondents, "understanding" may have implied sensitivity to or knowledge of their particular backgrounds.

It would be logical to expect that students whose primary language is not English might have different reactions to the urban alternative school and ALC programs. Because the numbers of these students in the two samples are quite small, we conducted a special analysis that combined and weighted the responses of all non-English speakers in both types of programs for all survey items related to program satisfaction. Generally speaking, their responses are not widely divergent from the overall samples. Self-esteem and attendance benefits are somewhat less important to this subgroup than to the total minority strata.

Interestingly, like the ALC students, the non-English speaking group does not view skills improvement as a major benefit of enrollment in the special programs; only 42 percent selected the statement. This may be because they believe that their skill levels are adequate (as we are presuming is the case with the ALC cohort). Alternatively, they may not be progressing in this area to their own satisfaction.

Table 11 allows comparisons between secondary school students using the open enrollment option and the students in the two types of nontraditional programs. In general, the open enrollment students agree less among themselves about the benefits of changing schools. The largest proportion selected having more friends, although learning more gained the most votes as the primary benefit. For students in the nontraditional programs, friends were far down the list. Conversely, issues that are of great importance to the at-risk students--such as the pace of instruction, problems in schools,

TABLE 11

Benefits of New or Different School Setting:
Comparison of Students Using the Open Enrollment Program
With Students in Second Chance Program
(Percent citing benefit)

Statements	Open Enrollment (n=587)	ALCs (n=528)	Urban Alternative Schools (n=90)
I have more friends.	67	30 *	34 **
I feel better about myself and my abilities.	64	64	76 **
My teachers and counselors take more time with me and understand me better.	60	74 *	75 **
I am taking responsibility for my own schooling.	46	76 *	66 **
I have fewer school problems.	44	81 *	74 **
My basic reading and math skills have improved.	41	42	64 **
I am more sure I will finish high school.	37	84 *	69 **
I can proceed at my own level and pace.	30	87 *	79 **
My classes are smaller.	28	79 *	89 **
I get along better with my family.	23	34 *	40 **
I come to school more regularly.	18	61 *	78 **

* The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between Open Enrollment and Area Learning Center students are significant after taking sampling error into account.

**The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between Open Enrollment and Urban Alternative School students are significant after taking sampling errors into account.

and simply finishing high school--are of far less concern to the open enrollment students.

As another indication of the impact of the ALCs and urban alternative schools on the students who attend them, the survey asked respondents to select from a series of possible next steps the step that matched what they thought they would do with their lives before enrolling in the nontraditional program and what they planned to do now, after participating in the program. Unfortunately, the structure of the item confused them, resulting in many multiple responses that could not be tabulated. Therefore, the data reported in this section should be considered suggestive at best. If they can be confirmed through a better-designed item in subsequent surveys, then the findings are striking indeed.

TABLE 12

Students' Expectations for the Future
Before and After Participation in a Nontraditional Program
(Percent citing response)[a]

	ALCs (n=536)		Urban Alternative Schools (n=97)	
Expectations	Before	Now	Before	Now
Drop out of high school	11% *	1%	32% *	0%
Graduate from high school	26	49	22	64
Education beyond high school	19 *	39	6 *	41
Missing	57	48	37	31

[a] Percents do not total 100 because expectation categories overlap.

* The chances are 95 in 100 that, for starred items, real differences between the groups of students remain after taking sampling error into account.

Although the direction of the change in students' personal ambitions is more pronounced for the urban alternative school students, the impact of participation in both types of programs leans strongly toward plans for more

education and training. At least on the day that they filled out the surveys, respondents saw dropping out as an abandoned notion. At a minimum, nearly all planned to graduate from high school.

Students' higher expectations might be attributable to a number of things. In some cases, the programs in which they are enrolled may actively stress the desirability of further education and training. Another possibility is that students' perceptions that they are doing better with their high school work in nontraditional settings may translate into confidence that they <u>can</u> go on to postsecondary education. It is also possible that the responses may be genuine, but the aspirations may be unrealistically elevated in terms of students' actual academic accomplishments.

Conclusion

Based on the opinions of the students who responded to these surveys, there seems little doubt that the private urban alternative school programs and the Area Learning Centers are an important part of Minnesota's overall array of educational choices. In comparison with their previous educational experiences, virtually all the respondents--who by definition are at risk of not completing high school--gave the second chance programs high marks as environments for learning and persisting in school. Students appreciated the caring teachers, the instructional approaches, and the value systems inherent in these settings. At the time that they were surveyed, their commitment (or recommitment) to their education was impressive.

It would be a mistake, however, for Minnesota policymakers or others who are tracking the impacts of Minnesota's experiment with educational choice to conclude from these data that the state high school graduation rate should soon rise. We base our urge for caution on both quantitative and qualitative information. First, it is important to keep in mind the fact that nearly half of the students in the original sample had left the urban alternative schools and ALCs in the course of the school year during which this study took place. A quarter of the sample had dropped out of school entirely--either for the first time or again. For the actual respondents, the programs worked, as evidenced by their high degree of satisfaction and the many benefits cited.

However, we know nothing about the nature of the problems or dissatisfactions encountered by the sizable group that disappeared.

During school year 1990-91, we had the opportunity to meet with several small groups of students who were attending either an Area Learning Center or a private urban alternative school. In these conversations, we learned a good deal about the personal and academic hurdles that some students face on the way to a diploma. Their problems are often complex and formidable. Some are starting from ground zero in terms of academic credits earned. Others juggle parenting and school or are recovering substance abusers. As positive as the students were about the second chance programs in which they were enrolled (we were unable to elicit any real criticisms of the programs), administrators and teachers told us that for most, progress toward a diploma is painfully slow. Attendance is erratic. Chronic negative attitudes toward school do not disappear overnight. Powers of concentration and personal motivation must be carefully developed as part of the educational recovery process. It is an uphill struggle for students and staff alike.

We conclude that the private urban alternative schools and the Area Learning Centers are second chance programs that appear to be successfully meeting some or all of the educational needs of some proportion of the target population identified in the legislation. As part of a broader vision of educational choice in Minnesota, they provide options that are significantly different from traditional secondary schools and therefore have appeal to students who have failed in traditional settings. These programs represent distinctive models for reconnecting students to the goal of completing high school. Ultimately, they should be evaluated in the context of other similar efforts beyond the state of Minnesota. Such an evaluation would be helpful to program planners and administrators in identifying other components or approaches that might reduce the significant attrition rate.

APPENDIX A

STUDY METHODOLOGY

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In this appendix, we provide specific information on data collection procedures, study samples, and the precision of estimates based on survey data.

Data Collection

This study is the result of cooperative research efforts between the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). It was designed to obtain preliminary data on the use and impact of two types of educational options available to at-risk youth in the state: the Area Learning Centers and the urban alternative schools.

Surveys were developed and refined by Policy Studies Associates, as contractor to ED. Draft versions were reviewed by a panel of experts convened by ED and by a stakeholder's group in Minnesota.

MDE administered the surveys, including follow-up with nonrespondents, and prepared the data. Surveys were group administered to samples of students at the Area Learning Center and alternative school sites.

Survey Samples

MDE obtained lists of students enrolled in 21 Area Learning Centers and 12 urban alternative schools during the fall semester of school year 1989-90. These lists were used to draw individual random samples of students attending each school site. Because of the nature of the population to be surveyed and the expectation that attrition and absence rates might be significant, a relatively high proportion of enrolled students were included in the samples: 57 percent of the 609 students reportedly enrolled in the urban alternative schools and 59 percent of the 2,630 students reportedly enrolled in the Area Learning Centers. A separate reporting sheet was prepared on which program administrators were asked to indicate the exit status (absent, dropped out, graduated, transferred, unknown) of sampled students who did not complete surveys. The study design did not call for follow-up with students no longer enrolled in the program.

Response Rates and Responding Samples

Table A-1 provides information on the survey sample and the outcomes of the data collection effort by the Minnesota Department of Education. As

expected, the number of students no longer enrolled in the programs or absent on the day of survey administration was considerable.

TABLE A-1

SURVEY RESPONSES

Survey Sample	Number of Surveys Distributed	Codable Surveys Returned	Exit Status Determined	Absent	Missing/ Other
Area Learning Centers	1,555	536	685	141	193
Alternative Schools	349	97	162	9	81

The response rate to the surveys can be calculated in two ways. We deliberately asked program personnel to provide us with the exit or attendance status of students not present to complete a survey. Although the study design and resources did not allow follow-up with these students, information about whether students had dropped out, graduated, transferred, or were simply absent is valuable in itself. Thus, for the Area Learning Centers, in terms of usable survey data (the number of codable surveys returned divided by the number distributed), the response rate is 34 percent. However, in terms of determining the ALC students' school status, we obtained a much higher response rate--about 88 percent. The corresponding response rates for the urban alternative schools were 28 percent (codable surveys) and 77 percent (school status determined).

We are reasonably certain that the group that had left the ALC and urban alternative programs would have a different demographic profile and different opinions about the programs themselves. Students who completed surveys represent the most persistent enrollees in these second chance programs during school year 1989-90.

Sampling Tolerances

When interpreting survey results, the reader should bear in mind that all surveys based on a sample of the total population are subject to sampling

error. Sampling error is the difference between the results obtained from a survey sample and the results that would have been obtained if an entire population had been surveyed. The size of the sampling error depends on the response rate.

You may use the following table to estimate the sampling error for any percentage in this study. The computed allowances take into consideration the effect of the sample design upon the sampling error. The figures below represent the confidence interval, or the range (plus or minus the figure shown) around the percentage within which the results of repeated samplings in the same time period could be expected to fall 95% of the time, assuming all other things are equal. For percentage estimates, the confidence intervals get smaller as sample sizes get larger, and get larger the closer the percentage estimate is to 50 percent.

The first table shows how much allowance should be made for the sampling error of a percentage:

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of a Percentage

In Percentage Points
(at 95 in 100 confidence level)*
Sample Size

	Urban Alternative School Students			Area Learning Center Students
	All	White	Minority	All
Sample Size	97	39	52	536
Percentages Near 10	6	10	9	3
Percentages Near 20	8	13	11	4
Percentages Near 30	10	15	13	4
Percentages Near 40	10	16	14	5
Percentages Near 50	10	16	14	5
Percentages Near 60	10	16	14	5
Percentages Near 70	10	15	13	4
Percentages Near 80	8	13	11	4
Percentages Near 90	6	10	9	3

*The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figure shown.

This table should be used in the following manner: Suppose that a survey based on a sample of all Urban Alternative students reported a percentage of 46 percent. To determine the sampling error, we would go to the row for "percentages near 50" in the table, and across to the column headed "Urban Alternative -- All." The number at this point is 10, which means that the 46 percent found in the sample is subject to a sampling error of plus or minus ten points. Therefore, the chances are 95 in 100 that the percent for the entire population would lie between 36 and 56 percent, with the most likely percentage being 46 percent.

When comparing survey results for two samples (for example, results from the Urban Alternative School (ALT) survey compared with the results of the Area Learning Center (ALC) survey), the question arises as to how large the difference between the groups must be before one is reasonably sure that it reflects a real difference. The tables below present the number of percentage points that must be allowed for such comparisons.

Many tables in the report compare the Area Learning Center students and the Urban Alternative School students. Table 1 is for percentages near 20 or 80; Table 2 is for percentages near 50. For percentages in between these points, the allowable error lies between those shown.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference

In Percentage Points
(at 95 in 100 confidence levels)*

TABLE 1: Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80

	Area Learning Centers
Size of Sample	536
Urban Alternative Schools - 97	9 (sampling error allowance)

TABLE 2: Percentages near 50

	Area Learning Centers
Size of Sample	536
Urban Alternative Schools 97	11 (sampling error allowance)

* The changes are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

These tables should be used in the following manner. Suppose that 85 percent of the Urban Alternative School students and 70 percent of the Area Learning Center students marked the same response to a question. There is a 15 percent difference in their responses. However, some of this difference may be the result of sampling error. Since the percentages are near 80, we would refer to Table 1, which tells us that we must allow 9 percentage points for anomalies in the sample. We can conclude that the Urban Alternative School students are between 6 and 24 points higher than the percentage among Area Learning Center students. This conclusion would be correct 95 percent of the time.

Other tables in the report compare the at-risk students attending either the Area Learning Centers or the Urban Alternative Schools with students who have changed schools under the Open Enrollment program. Tables 3 and 4 show

the sampling error that must be taken into account when looking at differences between these groups.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of the Difference

In Percentage Points
(at 95 in 100 confidence levels)*

TABLE 3: Percentages near 20 or percentages near 80

	Size of Sample	Open Enrollment 587
Area Learning Center Students	528	5
Urban Alternative School Students	97	9

TABLE 4: Percentages near 50

	Size of Sample	Open Enrollment 587
Alternative Learning	528	6
Urban Alternatives	97	11

* The chances are 95 in 100 that the sampling error is not larger than the figures shown.

This table should be used in the following manner: Suppose that 20 percent of all Urban Alternative students and 35 percent of Open Enrollment students gave the same response to a question. There is a 15 percent difference in their responses. However, to determine whether this 15 point difference reflects the <u>real</u> difference between the two samples, we must take sampling error into account.

Since the percentages are near 20, we would refer to Table 3. We would go to the column labeled "Open Enrollment", and the row labeled "Urban Alternatives." We find the number "11." This means that the allowance for

error is 11 percentage points, and that we could conclude that Open Enrollment students are between four and 26 points higher that the percentage among Urban Alternative students. Our conclusion would be correct 95% of the time. Therefore, we can conclude with confidence that a real difference exists between Open Enrollment and Urban Alternative students on that particular question.

In this example, if the percentage point spread between the two groups had been only 10 points, then the difference between the two samples would have been inconclusive.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEYS

ID#: _____

SECONDARY STUDENT SURVEY

OPEN ENROLLMENT PROGRAM

This survey will ask you questions about yourself and about your experiences in the new district where you now attend school. Your careful and thoughtful answers to these questions will help those who plan educational programs like the one you are in.

Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be reported in any way that can be identified with you. When you have completed the survey, please include it with the survey your family filled out and mail them both to the Minnesota Department of Education in the enclosed envelope.

INSTRUCTIONS: You will note that each question has its own instruction, for example: CHECK ONLY ONE, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY. These instructions are always typed in CAPITAL LETTERS: please follow them carefully.

Thank you!

The Minnesota Department of Education

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A-1. What is your date of birth: _____ / _____ / _____
month day year

A-2. What is your gender: a. male 49.2 (1) b. female 50.7 (2)

A-3. What is your race/ethnicity? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER)

a.	White, non-Hispanic	94.7 (1)
b.	Black, non-Hispanic	0.8 (2)
c.	Hispanic	0.4 (3)
d.	Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4 (4)
e.	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.3 (5)
f.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____	1.3 (6)

A-4. What is the last grade in school you have completed? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

6th or less	1.4 (1)	9th	20.4 (4)
7th	16.4 (2)	10th	20.4 (5)
8th	12.4 (3)	11th	19.1 (6)

Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____ (7)

A-5. Before enrolling in your current school/program, which type of school did you attend? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Public school	84.6 (1)
b.	Private school (not church sponsored)	2.2 (2)
c.	Parochial or church sponsored school	12.7 (3)
d.	Did not attend school	0.5 (4)

B. REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING AND DECISION-MAKING

B-1. Who **first** had the idea that you might benefit from changing schools to attend a school outside your district? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	29.9	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	33.3	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	32.0	(3)
d.	The school	1.3	(4)
e.	My social worker	0.2	(5)
f.	My probation officer	0	(6)
g.	Other (WHO?)_____	3.4	(7)

B-2. Please indicate whether the following people at your **old** school mainly encouraged or discouraged you in the decision to change schools/programs? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH PERSON LISTED)

	(1) Encouraged	(2) Discouraged	(3) Neither	(4) Not involved
a. Parent or guardian	77.5	2.0	8.1	12.4
b. Teacher	10.6	14.6	21.6	53.2
c. Counselor	9.9	7.1	18.2	64.8
d. Principal	7.5	15.7	18.9	57.9
e. Friends	29.5	26.7	13.4	30.3
f. Other	4.0	2.6	2.9	90.4

(PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

B-3. Which of the following reasons were important to you in your decision to change schools? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON)

			Most Important
a.	To take courses not available in my school	45.8	(13.1)
b.	To help me stay in school	11.6	(1.8)
c.	To study a subject that is interesting to me	29.5	(1.5)
d.	To follow the advice of my school counselor or principal	2.5	(0)
e.	To get courses better matched to my abilities	43.0	(8.6)
f.	To leave a school I didn't like	45.8	(16.3)
g.	To help me decide whether or not to pursue more education	8.4	(0.2)
h.	To be able to work and go to school	6.2	(0.5)
i.	To get teachers who are really interested in me and how I'm doing	43.1	(7.9)
j.	To avoid being bored	22.0	(1.2)
k.	To follow friends who were changing schools	15.1	(2.9)
l.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	35.2	(19.5)

B-4. Who made the **final** decision about your participation in the program? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	34.8	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	21.7	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	39.2	(3)
d.	The school	2.0	(4)
e.	My social worker	0.2	(5)
f.	My probation officer	0.2	(6)
g.	Other (WHO?)_____	2.0	(7)

B-5. The following statements refer to your school experiences **before** you changed schools/programs. (CHECK ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH STATEMENT)

		(1) Strongly agree	(2) Agree	(3) Disagree	(4) Strongly disagree
a.	I got along well with my teachers	27.7	57.6	10.6	4.1
b.	Discipline was fair in my school	13.5	51.7	24.0	10.8
c.	Students often disrupted class	20.0	36.7	38.3	5.0
d.	My teachers were interested in me	13.9	52.6	25.4	8.1
e.	When I worked hard on school work, my teachers praised my effort	13.1	48.9	33.9	4.1
f.	In class I often felt "picked on" by my teachers	4.0	13.6	55.4	27.0
g.	In school I often felt "picked-on" by other students	10.4	14.7	45.8	29.1
h.	Most of my teachers really listened to what I had to say	11.4	48.3	33.0	7.3
i.	I didn't feel safe at school	4.3	11.4	44.6	39.7
j.	Most classes were interesting and challenging	6.5	34.5	45.4	13.6
k.	Most classes repeated information I had already learned	9.2	32.5	53.7	4.5
l.	My counselors were helpful to me	8.1	36.4	36.0	19.4
m.	I received adequate help in choosing the courses I took	6.1	45.0	35.0	13.9

C. SATISFACTION/EXPECTATIONS

C-1. How satisfied were you with your old school/program, and how satisfied are you now with your new school/program? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH SCHOOL)

	Old school program	New school program	
Very satisfied	9.8	66.1	(1)
Satisfied	39.0	29.1	(2)
Dissatisfied	29.8	3.0	(3)
Very dissatisifed	20.0	0.9	(4)
No opinion yet	1.0	1.4	(5)

C-2. Since you started in your new school/program, how well are you doing with your school work? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a. I am doing better than I was in my old school 51.6 (1)

b. I am doing about the same as I was in my old school 43.5 (2)

c. I am doing worse than I was in my old school 4.9 (3)

C-3. The following are possible **benefits** that might result from your changing schools/program. Please indicate the ways in which your new school/program has made a difference for you. (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

			Most Important
a.	I come to school more regularly	18.4	(0.9)
b.	I have more in common with other students	61.4	(5.0)
c.	I have fewer school problems	43.7	(2.8)
d.	I have fewer personal problems	32.9	(0.7)
e.	My teachers and counselors take more time with me and understand me better	60.1	(8.1)
f.	My classes are smaller	28.4	(3.5)
g.	I can proceed at my own level and pace	30.2	(2.4)
h.	Teachers make classes apply to real life	44.0	(1.7)
i.	I am learning more in my new program	62.4	(13.0)
j.	My basic reading and math skills have improved	41.1	(1.9)
k.	I feel better about myself and my abilities	64.3	(10.6)
l.	I am more sure I will finish high school	36.6	(1.6)
m.	I feel I will be better trained for a job	43.2	(3.6)
n.	I get along better with my family	23.1	(0.3)
o.	I am being treated as a capable and worthwhile person	54.2	(3.3)
p.	I have more friends	67.4	(6.6)
q.	I am taking responsibility for my own schooling	46.3	(2.1)
r.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	7.4	(3.3)

NOW PLEASE GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON.

C-4. Some students have had problems changing schools or programs. For each possible problem stated below, please indicate whether it is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you. (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH STATEMENT)

		(1) A major problem	(2) A minor problem	(3) Not a problem
a.	Transportation to my new school/program is difficult	15.9	33.5	50.6
b.	People at my former school made it hard for me to participate in this program	8.2	20.1	71.7
c.	Getting child care is hard	0.2	0.4	99.4
d.	I don't feel prepared to handle the assigned course work in this program	1.4	8.9	89.7
e.	Classes are held at inconvenient times	0.5	3.4	96.1
f.	It is hard to participate in after school activities	5.8	19.1	75.1
g.	It is hard to make new friends in this program	1.6	86.8	8.3
h.	Teachers aren't very helpful	1.4	7.1	91.5
i.	Other problems (PLEASE SPECIFY)			
	_____	1.7	1.4	XXXXXXX
	_____	_____	_____	XXXXXXX

C-5. How could your new school/program be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

C-6. Which of the following best describes your expectations for the future <u>before</u> changing schools/programs and <u>now</u>? (CHECK ONLY <u>ONE</u> ANSWER IN EACH COLUMN)

		<u>Before</u> I thought I would:	<u>Now</u> I plan to:	
a.	Graduate from high school and enroll in college	45.7	54.3	(1)
b.	Graduate from high school and enter a vocational/technical training program	2.8	8.2	(2)
c.	Graduate from high school and enter the military service	3.1	1.7	(3)
d.	Graduate from high school and find a good job	4.8	2.8	(4)
e.	Graduate from high school and be a full-time parent/homemaker	0.3	0.2	(5)
f.	Drop out of high school and complete my GED	0.8	0.2	(6)
g.	Drop out of high school and find a good job	1.2	0	(7)
h.	Drop out of high school and try to find whatever work is available	0.8	0	(8)
i.	Uncertain	5.9	2.6	(9)
	Missing or multiple response	25.3	30.1	

C-7. Would you prefer to be back at your old school?

a. Yes 7.1 (1)

b. No 92.9 (2)

(PLEASE EXPLAIN) _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY.

PLEASE ADD IT TO THE SURVEY YOUR FAMILY COMPLETED SO THEY CAN BOTH BE RETURNED TO THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.

ID#_____

STUDENT SURVEY

AREA LEARNING CENTERS

LABEL HERE

This survey will ask you questions about yourself and about your experiences in the Area Learning Center where you now attend school. Your careful and thoughtful answers to these questions will help those who plan educational programs like the one you are in.

Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be reported in any way that can be identified with you. When you have completed the survey, please seal it in the return envelope and return it to your teacher or school director.

INSTRUCTIONS: You will note that each question has its own instruction, for example: CHECK ONLY ONE, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY. These instructions are always typed in CAPITAL LETTERS; please follow them carefully.

Thank You!

The Minnesota Department of Education

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A-1. What is your date of birth: _____ / _____ / _____
month day year

A-2. What is your gender: a. male 43 (1) b. female 57 (2)

A-3. What is your race/ethnicity? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER)

a.	White, non-Hispanic	92.0 (1)
b.	Black, non-Hispanic	0.8 (2)
c.	Hispanic	2.1 (3)
d.	Asian/Pacific Islander	0.4 (4)
e.	American Indian/Alaskan Native	2.7 (5)
f.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____	1.7 (6)

A-4. Where do you now live? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Urban area (Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Rochester, Moorhead)	5 (1)
b.	Suburban area (medium sized town/city other than those listed in a. above)	57 (2)
c.	Rural area (small town, country, farm)	37 (3)

A-5. What is the last grade in school you have completed? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

6th or less	0.2 (1)	9th	17 (4)
7th	0.2 (2)	10th	26 (5)
8th	5.0 (3)	11th	51 (6)

Other: PLEASE SPECIFY _____ (7)

A-6. Have you ever stopped attending school during the school year for any of the following reasons? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER)

a. Yes, I chose to drop out 27.1 (1)

b. Yes, I was expelled 6.1 (2)

c. Yes, I felt pushed out 5.3 (3)

d. Yes, for other reasons 25.3 (4)

Please explain: _____

e. No, I have never stopped attending school 36.1 (5)

A-7. When did you first enroll in your current school/program?

(approximately, if you aren't sure) _____ / _____
month year

A-8. What is the name of the school district in which you live:

_____

A-9. Before enrolling in your current school/program, which type of school did you attend? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a. public school 93.3 (1)

b. private school (not church sponsored) 1.3 (2)

c. parochial or church sponsored school 1.7 (3)

d. did not attend school 3.6 (4)

A-10. Please indicate which type of school/program you now attend? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	a regular public high school other than the one I would normally attend	3.8	(1)
b.	a nonpublic high school	0.2	(2)
c.	an alternative school/program	35.2	(3)
d.	an Area Learning Center	60.2	(4)
e.	a college, university, community college, or technical college	0.6	(5)

A-11. With whom do you currently live? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

a.	Both parents	38.9
b.	Mother only	22.2
c.	Father only	5.1
d.	Parent and other adult	4.4
e.	Other relative(s)	4.9
f.	Foster parent(s)	1.3
g.	Guardian(s)	1.1
h.	Friend(s)	8.0
i.	Other	20.1
	Please specify: _____	
j.	Alone	7.4

B. REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING AND DECISION-MAKING

B-1. Who **first** had the idea that you might benefit from changing schools to participate in the High School Graduation Incentives Program? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	61.3	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	3.1	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	11.3	(3)
d.	The school	10.7	(4)
e.	My social worker	2.5	(5)
f.	My probation officer	0.2	(6)
g.	Other, WHO? _____	10.9	(7)

B-2. Please indicate whether the following people at your **old** school mainly encouraged or discouraged you in the decision to change schools/programs? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH PERSON LISTED)

	(1) Encouraged	(2) Discouraged	(3) Neither	(4) Not involved
a. Parent or guardian	51.1	14.2	21.6	13.2
b. Teacher	24.0	10.2	19.3	46.4
c. Counselor	50.9	12.2	11.2	25.7
d. Principal	32.6	12.5	15.3	39.6
e. Friends	42.2	12.4	16.4	29.0
f. Other	10.1	2.8	6.2	81.0

B-3. Which of the following reasons were important to you in your decision to change schools/programs? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON.)

			Most Imp.
a.	To help me stay in school	77.0	(21.7)
b.	To follow the advice of my school counselor or principal	15.4	(1.7)
c.	To leave a school I didn't like	53.2	(6.7)
d.	To re-enter school after dropping out	35.2	(5.7)
e.	To change to more individualized or personalized learning	43.9	(4.6)
f.	To take courses not available in my school	5.9	(0.2)
g.	To help me decide whether or not to pursue more education	20.7	(2.1)
h.	To be able to work and go to school	49.8	(5.5)
i.	To get teachers who are really interested in me and how I'm doing	43.5	(3.4)
j.	I was required to attend to stay on welfare	4.2	(0.0)
k.	To stay in school after getting pregnant or becoming a parent	19.2	(5.7)
l.	I was required to attend by my drug/alcohol treatment program	2.9	(0.8)
m.	To avoid being bored	14.3	(0.6)
n.	To get away from friends who were a bad influence	14.1	(2.0)
.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	9.9	(4.2)

B-4. Who made the **final** decision about your participation in the program? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	75.1	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	4.1	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	10.7	(3)
d.	The school	6.6	(4)
e.	My social worker	0.2	(5)
f.	My probation officer	0.6	(6)
g.	Other, WHO? _____	2.7	(7)

B-5. The following statements refer to your school experiences **before** you changed schools/programs. (CHECK ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH STATEMENT)

		(1) Strongly agree	(2) Agree	(3) Disagree	(4) Strongly disagree
a.	I got along well with my teachers	8.3	47.5	29.5	14.7
b.	Discipline was fair in my school	7.7	43.4	33.4	15.5
c.	Students often disrupted class	14.0	44.4	37.3	4.2
d.	My teachers were interested in me	3.9	32.6	44.2	19.4
e.	When I worked hard on school work, my teachers praised my effort	7.3	36.5	42.9	13.3
f.	In class I often felt "picked on" by my teachers	9.6	20.6	53.8	16.0
g.	In school I often felt "picked-on" by other students	9.8	16.5	48.1	25.6
h.	Most of my teachers really listened to what I had to say	3.5	31.5	47.8	17.3
i.	I didn't feel safe at school	4.6	13.2	52.8	29.4
j.	Most classes were interesting and challenging	4.2	31.3	46.1	18.4
k.	Most classes repeated information I had already learned	13.9	43.1	38.3	4.8
l.	My counselors were helpful to me	17.1	36.0	28.9	18.0
m.	I received adequate help in choosing the courses I took	4.8	35.4	44.7	15.1
n.	School interfered with work	8.3	23.7	50.3	17.7

C. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM

C-1. How did you find out about your current school program? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON.

			Most Import.
a.	A teacher	17.4	(1.7)
b.	A principal or program director	28.0	(7.0)
c.	A counselor	47.5	(14.8)
d.	Friends	67.2	(25.6)
e.	Parents/guardians	23.3	(5.1)
f.	Welfare/social worker	5.1	(0.4)
g.	Probation officer	4.9	(1.0)
h.	Printed information from my former school	6.3	(0.8)
i.	A meeting at my former school	5.5	(0.2)
j.	Radio, TV, newspaper	3.6	(0.8)
k.	Community agency (Youth Services Bureaus, YMCA, crisis center, community action council)	0.8	(0.2)
l.	Drug/alcohol treatment center	3.8	(1.3)
m.	OPTIONS Hotline (toll free number)	0	(0)
n.	My church or synagogue	0.2	(0)
o.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	10.0	(4.2)
p.	I don't remember/don't know	2.5	(0.2)

C-2. What kinds of problems did you have getting information about the program? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

a. I did not have any problems getting good information	82.9
b. I had difficulty finding out where to go to get the information I needed	6.3
c. After I requested information, it took a long time to arrive	2.3
d. The information was hard to understand or confusing	1.1
e. The information was inaccurate	2.7
f. My former school was not helpful	19.5
g. My new school was not helpful	1.0
h. I had trouble finding out if I was eligible	8.2
i. The application process was complicated	3.3
j. Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____	4.6

D. SATISFACTION/EXPECTATIONS

D-1. How satisfied were you with your old school/program, and how satisfied are you now with your new school/program? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH SCHOOL)

		Old school program	New school program	
a.	Very satisfied	5.5	64.2	(1)
b.	Satisfied	21.6	29.3	(2)
c.	Dissatisfied	30.6	3.8	(3)
d.	Very dissatisifed	39.1	1.0	(4)
e.	No opinion yet	3.2	2.0	(5)

D-2. Since you started in your new school/program, how well are you doing with your school work? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	I am doing better than I was in my old school	86.1	(1)
b.	I am doing about the same as I was in my old school	13.0	(2)
c.	I am doing worse than I was in my old school	1.0	(3)

D-3. The following are possible **benefits** that might result from your changing schools/program. Please indicate the ways in which your new school/program has made a difference for you. CHECK **ALL** THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE **ONE MAIN REASON**.

			Most Imp.
a.	I come to school more regularly	61.4	(8.1)
b.	I have more in common with other students	51.3	(1.5)
c.	I have fewer school problems	80.7	(5.5)
d.	I have fewer personal problems	34.8	(0.9)
e.	My teachers and counselors take more time with me and understand me better	73.7	(6.8)
f.	My classes are smaller	78.8	(1.1)
g.	I can proceed at my own level and pace	86.6	(8.3)
h.	Teachers make classes apply to real life	53.2	(2.0)
i.	I am learning more in my new program	66.9	(3.6)
j.	My basic reading and math skills have improved	42.0	(0.4)
k.	I feel better about myself and my abilities	64.0	(5.1)
l.	I am more sure I will finish high school	83.9	(11.0)
m.	I feel I will be better trained for a job	36.9	(1.0)
n.	I am able to go to school **and** take care of my children	20.3	(4.9)
o.	I am able to go to school **and** hold a job	57.8	(3.0)
p.	I get along better with my family	33.9	(0.2)
q.	I am being treated as a capable and worthwhile person	63.6	(2.0)
r.	I have more friends	30.1	(0.6)
s.	I am taking responsibility for my own schooling	76.3	(4.9)
t.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____	4.5	(1.1)

D-4. Some students have had problems changing schools or programs. For each possible problem stated below, please indicate whether it is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you. (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH ITEM)

		(1) A major problem	(2) A minor problem	(3) Not a problem
a.	Transportation to my new school/program is difficult	3.1	18.5	78.4
b.	People at my former school made it hard for me to participate in this program	3.5	19.4	77.1
c.	Getting child care is hard	1.1	6.7	92.2
d.	I don't feel prepared to handle the assigned course work in this program	0.4	6.4	93.2
e.	Classes are held at inconvenient times	2.3	5.7	92.0
f.	It is hard to make new friends in this program	1.6	11.3	87.4
g.	Teachers aren't very helpful	0.8	3.6	95.6
h.	Other problems (PLEASE SPECIFY)			
	_____	1.5	0.9	XXXXXXX
	_____	____	____	XXXXXXX

D-5. How could your new school/program be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

D-6. Which of the following best describes your expectations for the future **before** changing schools/programs and **now**? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER FOR EACH COLUMN)

		Before I thought I would:	**Now** I plan to:	
a.	Graduate from high school and enroll in college	4.1	22.7	(1)
b.	Graduate from high school and enter a vocational/technical training program	2.1	18.6	(2)
c.	Graduate from high school and enter the military service	3.1	4.1	(3)
d.	Graduate from high school and find a good job	12.4	16.5	(4)
e.	Graduate from high school and be a full-time parent/homemaker	0	2.1	(5)
f.	Drop out of high school, but complete my GED	7.2	0	(6)
g.	Drop out of high school, but find a good job	10.3	0	(7)
h.	Drop out of high school and try to find whatever work is available	14.4	0	(8)
i.	Uncertain	9.3	5.2	(9)
	No response or multiple response	37.1	30.9	

D-7. Would you prefer to be back at your old school:

a. Yes 5.5

b. No 94.5

PLEASE EXPLAIN: _____

_____

_____

E. FAMILY INFORMATION

E-1. Have you or your family received welfare or public assistance at any time during the past five years?

a. Yes 39.8 (1)

b. No 60.2 (2)

E-2. How much education have your parents/guardians completed? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER FOR EACH COLUMN)

		Mother (guardian)	Father (guardian)	
a.	Did not graduate from high school	22.3	18.7	(1)
b.	High school graduate	41.5	9.9	(2)
c.	Business or trade school	6.4	3.3	(3)
d.	Some college	7.4	13.2	(4)
e.	College graduate	9.6	5.5	(5)
f.	More than 4 years of college	2.1	6.6	(6)
g.	I don't know	10.6	20.9	(7)

E-3. Do you and your family speak a language other than English at home?

a. Yes 19.1 (1) IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE WHAT LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN IN YOUR HOME:

_____

b. No 80.9 (2)

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY! PLEASE PUT YOUR SURVEY IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED AND RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

ID#_____

STUDENT SURVEY

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

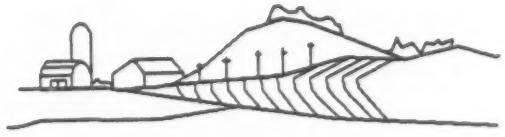
LABEL HERE

This survey will ask you questions about yourself and about your experiences in the Alternative Program where you now attend school. Your careful and thoughtful answers to these questions will help those who plan educational programs like the one you are in.

Your answers will be kept confidential and will not be reported in any way that can be identified with you. When you have completed the survey, please seal it in the return envelope and return it to your teacher or school director.

INSTRUCTIONS: You will note that each question has its own instruction, for example: CHECK ONLY ONE, CHECK ALL THAT APPLY. These instructions are always typed in CAPITAL LETTERS; please follow them carefully.

Thank You!



The Minnesota Department of Education

A. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

A-1. What is your date of birth: _____ / _____ / _____
month day year

A-2. What is your gender: a. male 51.7 (1) b. female 48.4 (2)

A-3. What is your race/ethnicity? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER)

a.	White, non-Hispanic	42.9 (1)
b.	Black, non-Hispanic	18.7 (2)
c.	Hispanic	14.3 (3)
d.	Asian/Pacific Islander	2.2 (4)
e.	American Indian/Alaskan Native	15.4 (5)
f.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) 6.6	(6)

A-4. Where do you now live? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Urban area (Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, Rochester, Moorhead)	90.4 (1)
b.	Suburban area (medium sized town/city other than those listed in a. above)	7.4 (2)
c.	Rural area (small town, country, farm)	2.1 (3)

A-5. What is the last grade in school you have completed? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

6th or less	1.1 (1)	9th	14.9 (4)
7th	2.1 (2)	10th	34.0 (5)
8th	17.0 (3)	11th	25.5 (6)

Other: PLEASE SPECIFY 5.3 (7)

A-6. Have you ever stopped attending school during the school year for any of the following reasons? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER)

a. Yes, I chose to drop out 11.6 (1)

b. Yes, I was expelled 6.3 (2)

c. Yes, I felt pushed out 4.2 (3)

d. Yes, for other reasons 28.4 (4)

Please explain: _____

e. No, I have never stopped attending school 49.5 (5)

A-7. When did you first enroll in your current school/program?

(approximately, if you aren't sure) _____ / _____
month year

A-8. What is the name of the school district in which you live:

_____

A-9. Before enrolling in your current school/program, which type of school did you attend? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a. public school 90.6 (1)

b. private school (not church sponsored) 5.2 (2)

c. parochial or church sponsored school 3.1 (3)

d. did not attend school 1.0 (4)

A-10. Please indicate which type of school/program you now attend? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	a regular public high school other than the one I would normally attend	2.1	(1)
b.	a nonpublic high school	2.1	(2)
c.	an alternative school/program	95.8	(3)
d.	an Area Learning Center	0	(4)
e.	a college, university, community college, or technical college	0	(5)

A-11. With whom do you currently live? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

a.	Both parents	36.1
b.	Mother only	29.9
c.	Father only	5.2
d.	Parent and other adult	9.3
e.	Other relative(s)	6.2
f.	Foster parent(s)	0
g.	Guardian(s)	7.1
h.	Friend(s)	2.1
i.	Other	7.2
	Please specify: _____	
j.	Alone	5.2

B. REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING AND DECISION-MAKING

B-1. Who first had the idea that you might benefit from changing schools to participate in the High School Graduation Incentives Program? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	44.3	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	12.4	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	14.4	(3)
d.	The school	3.1	(4)
e.	My social worker	0	(5)
f.	My probation officer	14.4	(6)
g.	Other, WHO?	11.3	(7)

B-2. Please indicate whether the following people at your old school mainly encouraged or discouraged you in the decision to change schools/programs? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH PERSON LISTED)

	(1) Encouraged	(2) Discouraged	(3) Neither	(4) Not involved
a. Parent or guardian	77.3	1.1	18.2	3.4
b. Teacher	7.1	9.5	13.1	70.2
c. Counselor	24.4	9.3	11.6	54.7
d. Principal	17.4	5.8	11.6	65.1
e. Friends	42.2	10.0	8.8	38.9
f. Other	17.7	0.1	3.1	78.1

B-3. Which of the following reasons were important to you in your decision to change schools/programs? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON.)

			(Very Important)
a.	To help me stay in school	82.5	(25.8)
b.	To follow the advice of my school counselor or principal	6.2	(0)
c.	To leave a school I didn't like	57.7	(6.2)
d.	To re-enter school after dropping out	16.5	(5.2)
e.	To change to more individualized or personalized learning	56.7	(6.2)
f.	To take courses not available in my school	5.1	(1.0)
g.	To help me decide whether or not to pursue more education	20.7	(2.1)
h.	To be able to work and go to school	20.7	(2.1)
i.	To get teachers who are really interested in me and how I'm doing	55.6	(4.1)
j.	I was required to attend to stay on welfare	6.2	(0)
k.	To stay in school after getting pregnant or becoming a parent	4.1	(0)
l.	I was required to attend by my drug/alcohol treatment program	2.0	(1.0)
m.	To avoid being bored	13.4	(2.1)
n.	To get away from friends who were a bad influence	31.1	(3.1)
o.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	18.5	(7.2)

B-4. Who made the **final** decision about your participation in the program? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	Myself	59.8	(1)
b.	My parent(s)/guardian(s)	6.2	(2)
c.	Both my parents and myself	15.5	(3)
d.	The school	1.0	(4)
e.	My social worker	0	(5)
f.	My probation officer	10.3	(6)
g.	Other, WHO? _____	7.2	(7)

B-5. The following statements refer to your school experiences **before** you changed schools/programs. (CHECK ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH STATEMENT)

		(1) Strongly agree	(2) Agree	(3) Disagree	(4) Strongly disagree
a.	I got along well with my teachers	6.3	46.3	37.9	9.5
b.	Discipline was fair in my school	5.2	34.8	37.5	12.5
c.	Students often disrupted class	15.6	46.9	34.4	3.1
d.	My teachers were interested in me	6.5	20.7	52.2	20.7
e.	When I worked hard on school work, my teachers praised my effort	5.3	25.3	48.4	21.1
f.	In class I often felt "picked on" by my teachers	5.3	21.3	52.1	21.3
g.	In school I often felt "picked-on" by other students	8.4	8.4	48.4	34.7
h.	Most of my teachers really listened to what I had to say	4.3	31.9	44.7	19.1
i.	I didn't feel safe at school	6.4	13.9	41.5	38.3
j.	Most classes were interesting and challenging	4.2	24.2	54.7	16.8
k.	Most classes repeated information I had already learned	11.8	34.5	46.2	7.5
l.	My counselors were helpful to me	8.9	22.2	41.1	27.8
m.	I received adequate help in choosing the courses I took	3.2	25.8	46.2	24.7
n.	School interfered with work	3.2	13.8	42.6	40.4

C. SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRAM

C-1. How did you find out about your current school program? CHECK ALL THAT APPIY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE ONE MAIN REASON.

			(Most Important)
a.	A teacher	4.1	(0)
b.	A principal or program director	6.2	(2.1)
c.	A counselor	14.4	(4.1)
d.	Friends	62.9	(28.9)
e.	Parents/guardians	37.1	(13.4)
f.	Welfare/social worker	6.2	(1.0)
g.	Probation officer	15.4	(8.2)
h.	Printed information from my former school	4.1	(0)
i.	A meeting at my former school	1.0	(0)
j.	Radio, TV, newspaper	8.2	(0)
k.	Community agency (Youth Services Bureaus, YMCA, crisis center, community action council)	19.6	(0)
l.	Drug/alcohol treatment center	2.1	(0)
m.	OPTIONS Hotline (toll free number)	0	(0)
n.	My church or synagogue	1.0	(0)
o.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	18.5	(7.2)
p.	I don't remember/don't know	0	(0)

C-2. What kinds of problems did you have getting information about the program? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

a. I did not have any problems getting good information	88.5
b. I had difficulty finding out where to go to get the information I needed	1.0
c. After I requested information, it took a long time to arrive	1.0
d. The information was hard to understand or confusing	1.0
e. The information was inaccurate	3.1
f. My former school was not helpful	12.4
g. My new school was not helpful	0
h. I had trouble finding out if I was eligible	2.1
i. The application process was complicated	2.1
j. Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____	6.2

_____

D. SATISFACTION/EXPECTATIONS

D-1. How satisfied were you with your old school/program, and how satisfied are you now with your new school/program? (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH SCHOOL)

		Old school program	New school program	
a.	Very satisfied	2.5	69.1	(1)
b.	Satisfied	21.5	24.7	(2)
c.	Dissatisfied	26.6	3.7	(3)
d.	Very dissatisifed	45.6	1.2	(4)
e.	No opinion yet	3.8	1.2	(5)

D-2. Since you started in your new school/program, how well are you doing with your school work? (CHECK ONLY ONE)

a.	I am doing better than I was in my old school	89.4	(1)
b.	I am doing about the same as I was in my old school	8.5	(2)
c.	I am doing worse than I was in my old school	2.1	(3)

D-3. The following are possible **benefits** that might result from your changing schools/program. Please indicate the ways in which your new school/program has made a difference for you. CHECK **ALL** THAT APPLY, THEN GO BACK AND CIRCLE **ONE MAIN REASON**.

			(Most Important)
a.	I come to school more regularly	78.1	(9.4)
b.	I have more in common with other students	51.0	(2.1)
c.	I have fewer school problems	74.0	(2.1)
d.	I have fewer personal problems	27.1	(1.0)
e.	My teachers and counselors take more time with me and understand me better	75.0	(7.3)
f.	My classes are smaller	88.5	(3.1)
g.	I can proceed at my own level and pace	79.2	(2.1)
h.	Teachers make classes apply to real life	57.3	(2.1)
i.	I am learning more in my new program	58.3	(2.1)
j.	My basic reading and math skills have improved	63.5	(2.1)
k.	I feel better about myself and my abilities	76.0	(2.1)
l.	I am more sure I will finish high school	68.8	(6.3)
m.	I feel I will be better trained for a job	29.2	(0)
n.	I am able to go to school **and** take care of my children	10.4	(0)
o.	I am able to go to school **and** hold a job	39.6	(3.5)
p.	I get along better with my family	39.6	(2.1)
q.	I am being treated as a capable and worthwhile person	71.9	(4.2)
r.	I have more friends	34.4	(0)
s.	I am taking responsibility for my own schooling	65.6	(4.2)
t.	Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____	4.2	(0)

D-4. Some students have had problems changing schools or programs. For each possible problem stated below, please indicate whether it is a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem for you. (CHECK ONLY ONE FOR EACH ITEM)

		(1) A major problem	(2) A minor problem	(3) Not a problem
a.	Transportation to my new school/program is difficult	1.1	22.3	76.6
b.	People at my former school made it hard for me to participate in this program	1.1	10.9	88.0
c.	Getting child care is hard	1.1	5.2	93.8
d.	I don't feel prepared to handle the assigned course work in this program	0	16.3	82.8
e.	Classes are held at inconvenient times	2.2	5.4	92.5
f.	It is hard to make new friends in this program	1.1	6.5	92.4
g.	Teachers aren't very helpful	1.1	2.2	96.7
h.	Other problems (PLEASE SPECIFY)			
	_____	1.0	1.0	XXXXXXX
	_____			XXXXXXX

D-5. How could your new school/program be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

D-6. Which of the following best describes your expectations for the future **before** changing schools/programs and **now**? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER FOR EACH COLUMN)

		Before I thought I would:	**Now** I plan to:	
a.	Graduate from high school and enroll in college	13.2	21.5	(1)
b.	Graduate from high school and enter a vocational/technical training program	6.2	17.9	(2)
c.	Graduate from high school and enter the military service	1.7	3.0	(3)
d.	Graduate from high school and find a good job	3.9	6.9	(4)
e.	Graduate from high school and be a full-time parent/homemaker	0.9	0.2	(5)
f.	Drop out of high school, but complete my GED	4.5	0.4	(6)
g.	Drop out of high school, but find a good job	3.9	0.7	(7)
h.	Drop out of high school and try to find whatever work is available	3.0	0	(8)
i.	Uncertain	5.2	1.7	(9)
	Missing or multiple response	57.5	47.8	

D-7. Would you prefer to be back at your old school?

a.	Yes	11.4
b.	No	88.6

PLEASE EXPLAIN: _____

_____

_____

E. FAMILY INFORMATION

E-1. Have you or your family received welfare or public assistance at any time during the past five years?

a. Yes 38.4 (1)

b. No 61.6 (2)

E-2. How much education have your parents/guardians completed? (CHECK ONLY ONE ANSWER FOR EACH COLUMN)

		Mother (guardian)	Father (guardian)	
a.	Did not graduate from high school	15.7	23.9	(1)
b.	High school graduate	41.1	28.4	(2)
c.	Business or trade school	9.1	11.0	(3)
d.	Some college	13.8	10.4	(4)
e.	College graduate	6.5	6.7	(5)
f.	More than 4 years of college	5.1	5.7	(6)
g.	I don't know	8.7	13.7	(7)

E-3. Do you and your family speak a language other than English at home?

a. Yes 6.4 (1) IF YES, PLEASE INDICATE WHAT LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN IN YOUR HOME:

b. No 93.6 (2)

Hmong - 0.4
Spanish - 2.7
Vietnamese - 0.4
Other - 3.1

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY! PLEASE PUT YOUR SURVEY IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED AND RETURN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.